

Age Effects in Second Language Learning: Stepping Stones Toward Better Understanding

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"As should be apparent by now, the position taken in this book is that second language teaching should focus on encouraging acquisition, on providing input that stimulates the subconscious language acquisition potential all normal human beings have. This does not mean to say, however, that there is no room at all for conscious learning. Conscious learning does have a role, but it is no longer the lead actor in the play." (Krashen and Terrell, 1981)

In his article, the author DeKeyser (2013), points out the relevance attained to the Second Language Learning, with controversial issues such as conceptual misunderstanding and methodological difficulties. On the other hand, the author seeks that the debate between each other is be able to agree on them, through the suggestions for improvement in subject selection, data collection, and instrumentation to understand how crucial is the age effects for educational policy and curriculum design; and how different are the foreign language learning from second language learning environments.

Similarly, the main focuses of the study are the biggest controversial points related with the better performance in children rather than adults according to the layman and psychologist or linguistics (DeKeyser 2013); nevertheless, the author highlights three main questions to debate during the article:

What the properly age of acquisition is; how to work with individual variables such as motivation, attitude and identity in second language context; and finally, differences developed in the critical/crucial learning.

The age effects are an important issue to understand a number of reasons, because of the nature involve in the learning process according some psycholinguistics opinions and it allows reflection (DeKeyser, 2013). As a result, the three questions mentioned above and the age effects learning are important for the aspects of curriculum development and its adaptation to different ages. For instance, the author exposed the case of immigrant children who are not dominant in the language as native speaker; and he requests researchers to comprehend the L2 structures and their problematic, when they emerge under what circumstances and what the educational system do about it.

Also, in the article comments from Abrahamsson & Hyltenstam (2009); Bigelow & Tarone (2004); Christie (2012); Schleppegrell (2004); Tarone, Bigelow, & Hansen (2009) were cited by DeKeyser (2013), who express that, immigrant children before the age of 15 can easily learn the language in a natural exposure, however, older than 15 are implicate in the linguistics patterns competences, developing

abstracts and formal aspects in language to have success in the professional performance.

The main differences between native speakers and immigrant children are the instructional process that native speakers face at different ages (Cameron, 2001; Muñoz, 2007) and the educational authority (parents, administrators) that invest time in children and their educational budget (Curtain, 1998; García Mayo & García Lecumberri, 2003; Larson-Hall, 2008).

Taking into account these facts, the author states how the conceptual misunderstanding is presented in the acquisition because of its effects. Likewise, DeKeyser (2013) discusses about the fact that children learning go faster than adults, and expresses that there is no evidence to support it. Moreover, the author points out that immigrant children's learning is slower than adults (Krashen, Long, & Scarcella, 1979), children reach the native speaker level while adults work with an arrested development of knowledge (Abrahamsson & Hyltenstam, 2009; Abrahamsson, 2012), it means, a knowledge work and develop through the process, that allow adults be aware about how to perform according to grammar complexity and English level.

Nevertheless, the author states the comparison in the learning process from immigrants and foreign language learners, the children only have an implicit progress, that overtake soon their parents; but children continue being slower than adults when they are learning the language in a foreign language context (García-Mayo & García Lecumberri, 2003; Muñoz, 2006) and adults, possess a highly explicit performance (Dekeyser, 2000; Dekeyser, Alfi-Shabtay, & Ravid, 2010; Paradis, 2009).

In the Methodological Difficulties the author emphasizes the process that children immigrants present in the acquisition of a language and the influence of the L1; moreover, he also seeks to obtain data for researchers, which allow establishing patterns about age ranges in the critical period area.

Finally, the factors related with the age effects expressed by the author, are how the kind of knowledge can be trigger according to the level of student (cognitive capacity) evaluating the L2 learners' knowledge during the process in order to produce elicited functions and increase knowledge (cf., e.g., Ellis, 2005; Jiang, 2012).

According to the information presented above, the author makes emphasis about how important is L2, to raise language acquisition in students. He also, states that adults gain better key concepts in English rather than children; and adults can perform and increase their abilities thanks to the awareness in the knowledge learned in every process. As a final point, the context is crucial to be active in the process to learn a second language instead of using the L1 which restrict the language explicit production in the learner.

Aspects to consider

In this article we have identified relevant aspects that allow us to trigger into a discussion. Thanks to the kind of information exposed by the author, we can highlight a main component that divide the evidence through the normal environment to be contrasted to our context, type of students, knowledge, data obtained from different researchers; and the kind of procedures used in different countries to teach and learn a foreign language.

To summarize all this facts, we had move onto the relevant features in order to get a discussion and, we related all those components in two main issues: the process of learning between children and adults and; the native speakers' skills performance in children and the L1 use.

To begin with, we have highlighted some interesting features presented in the article, which deal with the process of learning that is highly performed by the adults rather than children, and the grammatical structure that adults develop. The author states that children cannot be as proficiency as adults but reached the performance through the years. Moreover, even in the context, children have to deal with the management of a L2 and L1 when they are exposed to environment, but the learning proficiency is still slower to the children.

However, we can say that children can learn and produce an explicit language if they have cognitive resources proposed by teachers and tools, such as the TIC's which provide an English environment inside the classroom. Additionally, these factors allow students increase or decrease their performance through children's effects.

According to Matsuoka and Smith (2008), the age is an important factor concerning with the language learning; and children enjoy and have advantages in the learning language over the adults because of their plasticity (e.g. Birdsong, 1992; DeKeyser, 2000; Oyama, 1976; Patkowski, 1980). In other words, it is refer to the ability that children have to process the information without a mechanical system. For instance, the human beings come with "devices" that support the language acquisition beyond a simple habitual formation (Chomsky, 1957).

Moreover, the issue about the slower children's learning process has not been taken into account in the curriculum process and; its purpose should be adapted to the different ages (DeKeyser 2013). According to many theories and research, the critical age for learning a second language is childhood. It is here, where teachers should take advantage of the plasticity that children have and contributes to the fast learning of these.

These studies have proved that the process of learning the grammar of a SL it is not affected by age but it is related with the brain maturation (Matsuoka and Smith

2008). On the other hand, Chomsky (1966) proposed a universal grammar as an innate system of language acquisition in order to measure learners' universal grammar as part of grammaticality judgment tests. This process allows students organize the target language' morph-syntactic system when they are focusing on the universal grammar (Johnson & Newport, 1989)

To conclude, we can say that the language learning in children is possible, taking in mind the different focal area of acquisition, phonology/pronunciation, as a sensitive period from younger learners unlike older learners, who face morph syntax/grammar (Bialystok & Hakuta, 1999). As a result, the exposure to English environments and the teachers' time spend in students will allow not only, to trigger the learners' production in order to have a good English proficiency, but also there will be connection of knowledge to stimulate their brains to absorbed new concepts and be mastered before the children lose their plasticity (Ellis, 1994).

The second issue to discuss is; children's less performance to be as good as a native speaker in the language proficiency. We can see that children can learn easier than adults according to the complexity of the learning acquisition and the students' need. Nevertheless, the author in his speeches mentioned that learner will get a well performance through the years to be a native speaker.

However, thanks to abilities develop by children we could say that these students can be as proficiency as a native speaker; even if these students are not immerses in an English speaking country. On the other hand, the factors such attitudes, motivation and great teachers who perform desirable lessons, may enhance and create many opportunities to spread the learners' knowledge to be competitive in a globalized English speaking world.

But, why is important to focus on children and their language capacity to produce speech through cognitive process, in one hand, and check the advantages or failures that adults possess when they are facing oral production in English; on the other hand, it will be the anxiety presented in the interaction with something new or unfamiliar. Consequently, we can highlight a common factor between them: the proximity to be as fluent as an English speaker that diverges from the age, level proficiency and economic status that categorize the learner according to their skills; in other words, learners' aptitudes to be confident in the foreign language.

Thus, we want to say that despite the authors' point of view, learners can adopt the whole language functionality and use, if they are trigger to perform it or, if they are constantly stimulate in activities that increase children's' cognitive capacity. Ellis (1994), states that two key concerning are important in the child learning process: affective and motivational factors; i.e. "child learners are, in general, more strongly motivated to communicate with native speakers and to integrate culturally because they are less conscious and suffer less from anxiety about communicating in a second language".

Though, a relevant issue of sensory acuity is about the ability that possesses young learners to perceive sounds as native speaker but at certain age the cerebral maturation or loss of plasticity affect learner's skills to acquire both neurological structure in terms of pronunciation and grammar (Ellis, 1994).

In conclusion, we can say, that children can manage better the knowledge they are acquiring to be contrasted with real context as a native speaker rather than adults. Ellis (1994) expresses that it is thanks to the amount of input that children received through the language information; due to adults are focused on negotiation of meaning and the process of a language how is store. For example; children store both languages – L1 and L2 information separately- and become coordinate bilinguals and adults, also stores both L1/L2 knowledge together and become compound bilinguals. According to Ellis (1994) "Coordinate bilinguals can use both languages automatically whilst compound bilinguals cannot".

Finally, Selinger (1978), states that all the young learners observed, who started early in the second language acquisition through the exposition were attain a native or native-like accent than young learners.

Here in Colombia, the citizens are getting involved in the process to be part of an English setting. However, we do not possess an English context in every street, but we are getting immerse in the language through movies, music and international programs that allows us to be closer than ever to an English environment. Consequently, we could say that to be as proficiency as a native, we could use different visual and oral resources presented in books or audios, and create distinctions in the use of the L1 which is part of our communication and it does not get confused in the acquisition of the new vocabulary learned and; children possess a vast of opportunities to enhance their knowledge to a higher level.

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